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The Role of Empowerment in Improving Generation Z Engagement and Performance in the Workplace

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Abstract

Generation Z is becoming a dominant force in the workforce, raising critical concerns for organizations aiming to maximize productivity and retain talent. To address this challenge, optimizing the potential of Gen Z through employee empowerment is essential. As this generation values autonomy and recognition for their contributions, employee empowerment plays a key role in enhancing both employee engagement and performance. This study explores the relationship between employee empowerment, employee engagement, and employee performance among Generation Z employees in formal sector companies in Semarang. A quantitative approach was employed, using questionnaires distributed to 100 Gen Z employees, with data analyzed through Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) using Partial Least Squares (PLS). The findings reveal strong correlation between employee empowerment, performance, and engagement. Additionally, the study emphasizes the role of employee engagement as a mediator in the connection between employee empowerment and performance, demonstrating that positioning employee engagement as a mediator is both relevant and impactful.

Keywords

Employee Empowerment, Employee Performance, Employee Engagement, Generation Z.

1. Introduction

Generation Z represents the youngest cohort of employees increasingly entering the workforce each year. Those born between 1997 and 2012 are now beginning to dominate the labor market, bringing distinct characteristics compared to previous generations like Generations X and Y. This generation is known for its technological fluency, reliance on digital information, and high demand for flexibility and work-life balance. Additionally, Generation Z employees recognize the importance of financial stability and strive to achieve strong performance in their roles (Mahmoud et al., 2021). These traits often create gaps in workplace interactions, especially with older generations, who may prioritize job stability and hierarchical structures, while Generation Z values personal growth, transparency, and meaningful, collaborative work experiences. Generation Z, now increasingly active in the workforce, holds a vital role across various industries. In regions with stable economic conditions, such as Semarang, organizations must adopt effective strategies to empower this generation and address intergenerational differences. Empowerment granting authority, responsibility, and decision-making freedom is a key approach that aligns with Generation Z's values of autonomy and personal growth (Tanjeen, 2013, Yang et al., 2024). Schaufeli (2013) emphasizes that empowerment supports high-performance practices essential for organizational sustainability.

Employee engagement, or the level of commitment and enthusiasm at work, is also crucial for Generation Z, who seek emotionally meaningful work experiences (Annan-Prah & Andoh, 2023). Engagement fosters a strong psychological connection between employees and organizations. Meanwhile, employee performance, defined as output quality and quantity aligned with organizational goals, is influenced by empowerment, engagement, and perceived support (Krisnayanti & Sriathi, 2022; Utami et al., 2023; Hadi, 2023). Prior research confirms that empowerment and engagement contribute significantly to enhancing workplace productivity and effectiveness.

Nevertheless, the connection between employee empowerment, engagement, and performance is not always direct or straightforward, particularly when examined within the unique context of Generation Z. Research has shown mixed results regarding the effects of empowerment on engagement and performance across different employee groups. Some studies find that empowerment positively influences engagement and performance, ultimately enhancing productivity and retention. For example, Natrajan et al. (2019) revealed that employee empowerment leads to improved performance, resulting in satisfaction and retention. Likewise, Islam et al. (2022) emphasized that employee engagement significantly contributes to better performance, while Mohapatra and Sundaray (2018) highlighted empowerment's role in fostering a sense of purpose that enhances outcomes. However, Ashok (2019) found that empowered employees do not always demonstrate improved performance, indicating that contextual and generational factors may moderate these relationships. Despite these findings, limited research specifically investigates how these dynamics unfold among Generation Z employees, who possess distinct values, motivations, and work expectations compared to older cohorts. This gap highlights the need to explore whether empowerment and engagement have similar or divergent effects on the performance of Generation Z in the modern workplace.

Employee empowerment is crucial for maintaining employee engagement within organizations (Mathew et al., 2018; Brien et al., 2021; Nwachukwu et al., 2021). Delegating tasks and responsibilities to employees nurtures a sense of engagement (Natrajan et al., 2019), correlating with higher satisfaction and enthusiasm, which in turn reduces absenteeism and enhances productivity. However, Lubis et al. (2023) found that empowerment could, in some cases, reduce employee engagement.

Employee engagement may also influence performance outcomes. Masharyono et al. (2023) found a significant relationship between engagement and performance, indicating that increased engagement corresponds with improved performance. This connection suggests that organizations should optimize engagement practices, crafting effective HRD strategies to ensure positive outcomes (Teimouri et al., 2016; Taib et al., 2018; Kareem & Hussein, 2019; Rumman et al., 2020). Nonetheless, Wardiansyah et al. (2024) concluded that not all forms of employee engagement impact performance, indicating that the link may vary across contexts.

Employee empowerment influences performance through the mediating role of engagement. Research by Al Zeer et al. (2023), Kara and Çetinel (2023), and Orenuga et al. (2024) shows that effective empowerment is linked to higher productivity, job satisfaction, and personal efficacy. Engagement further enhances performance through mechanisms such as training, empowerment, and recognition (Natrajan et al., 2019). However, Budiarto et al. (2023) found that engagement may have a negative and insignificant effect on performance. This study examines the impact of empowerment on the performance of Generation Z in Semarang, with a specific focus on the mediating role of engagement, aiming to offer insights into how empowerment can optimize their potential and address intergenerational dynamics in the workplace.

2. Literature Review and Hypothesis Development

2.1. Employee Empowerment and Employee Performance

According to Blau (1964), workplace social relationships are governed by reciprocity, where empowerment provided by organizations such as training, decision-making autonomy, and support is reciprocated by employees through increased commitment and performance. Empowerment fosters a sense of value and motivation among employees. Saks (2006) adds that employee engagement arises from perceived organizational support and mediates the link between empowerment and performance by reinforcing employees' reciprocal responses. When organizations grant autonomy and responsibility, employees feel trusted and are encouraged to innovate, take initiative, and invest more effort into their tasks, leading to improved performance. This is supported by findings from Natrajan et al. (2019) and Islam et al. (2022) and Al Zeer et al. (2023) and Kara and Çetinel (2023) and Orenuga et al. (2024), who confirm the positive impact of empowerment on performance.

Engaged employees are not only more satisfied but also more productive, as engagement fosters collaboration, creativity, and a positive work environment. This leads to better task outcomes, efficiency, and overall organizational success. High engagement levels encourage employees to contribute ideas, take ownership, and align themselves with company goals. This view is reinforced by Rumman et al. (2020) and Masharyono et al. (2023) and Prayogi et al. (2023) whose research shows a significant positive effect of employee engagement on performance. Together, these studies emphasize that both empowerment and engagement are key factors in enhancing employee and organizational performance.

H1: Employee empowerment has a positive effect on employee performance.

H2: Employee engagement has a positive effect on employee performance.

2.2. Employee Empowerment on Engagement

When employees are given the chance to be involved in decision-making and have access to the resources they need, they feel more connected to the organization. This engagement is not just about physical presence at work, but also includes emotional and mental attachment to their jobs. Employees who feel involved in the process and have a voice in the decisions made are likely to demonstrate higher commitment and

greater dedication to the organization's goals. This statement aligns with research by Natrajan et al. (2019) and Nwachukwu et al. (2021), whose findings indicate that employee empowerment positively and significantly influences employee engagement. Generation Z, born between 1997 and 2012, now represents a growing share of the workforce, including in economically stable regions like Semarang. Known for their technological fluency, demand for autonomy, and desire for meaningful work, Generation Z often differs from older cohorts who emphasize stability and hierarchy (Mahmoud et al., 2021). These generational differences create unique challenges for organizations, particularly in promoting engagement and optimizing performance. Empowerment, defined as the delegation of authority and decision-making freedom, aligns with Generation Z's values of independence and growth (Tanjeen, 2013; Yang et al., 2024). According to Schaufeli (2013), empowerment also supports sustainable high-performance practices. However, while empowerment often leads to enhanced engagement and performance, the relationship may vary depending on generational context. Studies by Mohapatra and Sundaray (2018) and Ashok (2019) and Islam et al. (2022) show mixed results, emphasizing the need for more targeted research on Generation Z. Thus, this study hypothesizes that employee empowerment positively influences engagement among Generation Z employees and plays a key role in improving performance within organizations adapting to new workforce dynamics.

H3: Employee empowerment has a positive effect on employee engagement.

2.3. Employee Engagement on Empowerment and Performance

The empowerment provided by the organization creates an environment that encourages Zeer et al. (2023), Kara & Çetinel (2023), and Orenuga et al. (2024), the findings engagement, and this engagement, in turn, enhances employee performance. In this context, empowerment not only has a direct impact on performance outcomes but also strengthens the positive effects through employee engagement. Employees who feel involved and valued are more likely to take responsibility for their work and strive to achieve higher performance standards. Therefore, organizations need to pay attention to both aspects' empowerment and engagement as a holistic strategy to improve employee performance. This claim is consistent with studies by Al of which demonstrate that employee engagement has a positive and significant mediating effect between employee empowerment and performance outcomes. This relationship becomes particularly important when viewed through the lens of Generation Z, the youngest cohort in today's workforce, born between 1997 and 2012. Generation Z is known for its tech-savviness, preference for autonomy, and desire for meaningful work experiences (Mahmoud et al., 2021). Unlike previous generations, they are more motivated by personal development, flexibility, and workplace transparency. In stable economies such as Semarang, empowering Generation Z with decision-making opportunities, recognition, and trust can drive both engagement and performance (Yang et al., 2024; Tanjeen, 2013). Schaufeli (2013) highlights that such empowerment supports high-performance and sustainable organizational practices. Furthermore, Annan-Prah & Andoh (2023) emphasize that Generation Z values emotionally fulfilling work, which reinforces the mediating role of engagement in converting empowerment into higher performance. Thus, a deeper understanding of this dynamic is essential for organizations seeking to leverage the full potential of Generation Z in achieving strategic goals.

H4: Employee engagement positive mediates the indirect effect between employee empowerment and employee performance.

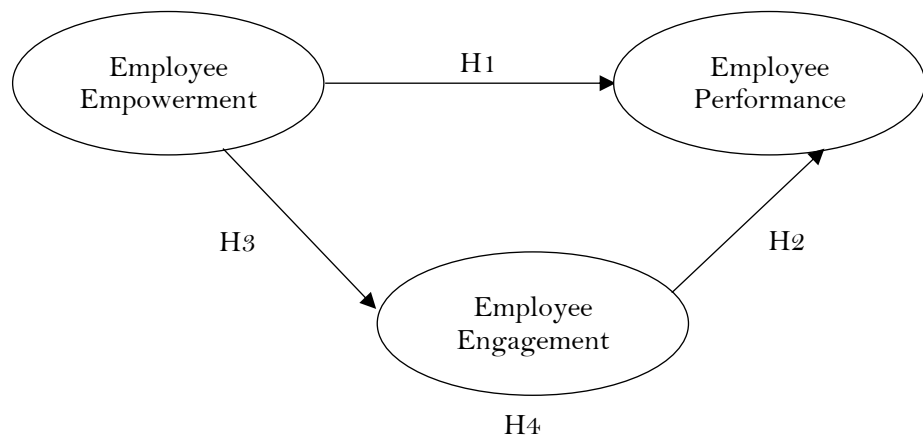


Figure 1. Conceptual Framework

The Figure 1 shows a conceptual model that illustrates the relationship between employee empowerment, employee engagement, and employee performance. In this model, employee empowerment (employee empowerment) acts as an independent variable that has a direct influence on employee performance (employee performance), as well as an indirect influence through employee engagement (employee engagement) as a mediating variable. The arrow connecting empowerment to engagement and then to performance shows that employee engagement can strengthen the impact of empowerment on performance. That is, when employees feel empowered for example through autonomy in decision making and organizational support they will be more emotionally and cognitively involved in their work, which ultimately drives increased performance. This model emphasizes the importance of employee engagement as a psychological mechanism that bridges the relationship between empowerment and performance.

3. Methods

This study employs a causal quantitative approach aimed at examining the influence of employee empowerment on performance through the mediating role of employee engagement. The population consists of Generation Z employees working in the formal sector in Semarang, Indonesia. Generation Z, defined as individuals born between 1997 and 2012, is increasingly dominating the modern workforce, characterized by digital fluency, a preference for autonomy, and high expectations for meaningful work experiences (Mahmoud et al., 2021). These traits distinguish them from older generations, highlighting the need for adaptive organizational strategies, particularly in regions with economic stability like Semarang. The sampling technique used is non-probability sampling with purposive sampling, where participants were selected based on specific criteria, first born between 1997 and 2012 (Gen Z), second is currently working in the formal sector, and third is having at least 6 months of employment experience. These criteria were applied to ensure that the sample accurately reflects the target population relevant to the study's focus on generational dynamics.

Data were collected through an online questionnaire, utilizing close-ended questions on a five-point Likert scale to measure employee empowerment, engagement, and performance. The questionnaire was distributed via digital platforms to Gen Z employees in Semarang. A total of 110 responses were obtained; however, 10 responses were excluded for not meeting the predetermined criteria, resulting in a final sample size of 100. In determining the adequacy of the sample size, Hair et al. (2014) suggest that for models with few latent variables, a minimum of 30 to 50 observations is sufficient for Partial Least Squares Structural Equation

Modeling (PLS-SEM). Given the relatively simple structure of the model and the robust sample size, the study proceeds with data analysis using the SmartPLS 4 software.

To ensure the quality of the results, tests for validity and reliability were conducted during the initial data analysis phase. These tests ensure that the measurement items accurately reflect the constructs being studied and are consistent across respondents. The use of PLS-SEM allows the researcher to analyze both direct and indirect relationships among variables, particularly suitable for testing the mediating effect of employee engagement on the relationship between empowerment and performance.

4. Results

The initial step in performing data analysis is to assess convergent validity, which can be observed through the outer loading value. The outer loading calculation shows that all indicators are valid as each has a value greater than 0.70. The subsequent step after assessing convergent validity is to examine construct reliability and validity. As stated by Ghazali and Latan (2015), a construct is deemed valid if it meets the following criteria: Cronbach's Alpha > 0.70, Composite Reliability > 0.70, and Average Variance Extracted (AVE) > 0.50. Based on these standards, all indicators for the research variables in this study fulfill the necessary requirements for construct validity and reliability.

Inner model analysis, also referred to as structural analysis, it is employed to identify the connections between research variables. The analysis method is by examining the R-square value and structural path parameters to analyze the relationships between variables and their significance value. The following is an illustration of the inner model output in this research.

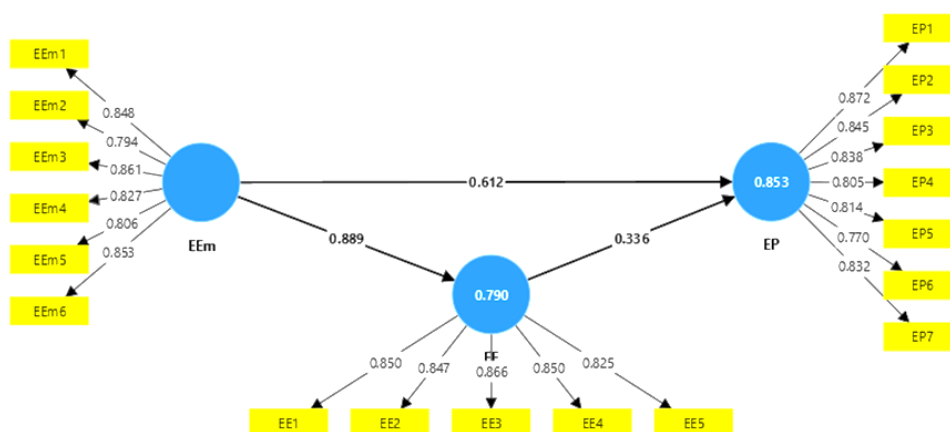


Figure 2. Structural Model (Inner Model)

Figure 2 displays the Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) structural model that examines the relationship between three latent variables: Employee Empowerment (EEm), Employee Engagement (EE), and Employee Performance (EP). Each latent variable is measured through several indicators indicated by arrows from the blue circle (latent variable) to the yellow box (indicator). For example, EEm is measured by six indicators (EEm1–EEm6), EE with five indicators (EE1–EE5), and EP with seven indicators (EP1–EP7). All indicators show loading factor values above 0.70, indicating that the indicators are valid in measuring their respective constructs.

In terms of the relationship between constructs, it can be seen that Employee Empowerment (EEm) has a direct influence on Employee Performance (EP) with a coefficient value of 0.612, as well as an indirect influence through Employee

Engagement (EE) of 0.336. In addition, the direct effect of EEm on EE has a coefficient of 0.889, indicating a very strong and significant relationship. The R^2 value shown in the blue circle shows the amount of variance explained by other constructs: EE of 0.790 (meaning 79% of EE variance is explained by EEm) and EP of 0.853 (meaning 85.3% of EP variance is explained by EEm and EE). This shows that the model has very good predictive power for employee engagement and performance variables.

Table 1. Coefficient of Determination

Variable	R Square	Adjusted R Square
EE	0.790	0.788
EP	0.853	0.850

Based on Table 1 above, it can be seen that the Adjusted R-square value of the EP variable is 0.850, which means that the modelled independent variables (EEm & EE) influence EP by 85%. Meanwhile, the Adjusted R-square value for the EE variable is 0.788, which means that the modelled independent variables (EEm) influence EE by 72.1%.

In this research, hypothesis testing is conducted using the bootstrapping method. This bootstrapping test allows us to observe the T-statistics and P-values, which indicate the effect of the independent variable on the dependent variable based on its significance level. The T-statistics and P-values are presented in the path coefficient table (Ghozali & Latan, 2015). The mediation effect is also tested using the bootstrapping method, with results shown in the specific indirect effects table. A relationship construct between variables can be said to have a significant relationship if it has a T-statistics value > 1.96 and P-values < 0.05 . The following table displays the path coefficients and specific indirect effects derived from the bootstrapping test results.

Table 2. Path Coefficient

Variable	Original Sample	Sample Average	Std. Deviation	T Statistic	P Values
EE -> EP	0.336	0.332	0.093	3.635	0.000
EEm -> EE	0.889	0.885	0.031	28.342	0.000
EEm -> EP	0.612	0.613	0.087	7.047	0.000
EEm > EE > EP	0.299	0.294	0.083	3.582	0.000

Table 2 displays the results of the structural model analysis using the PLS-SEM approach, specifically evaluating the direct and indirect relationships between Employee Empowerment (EEm), Employee Engagement (EE), and Employee Performance (EP). The direct path from EEm to EE shows the strongest effect, with a path coefficient of 0.889, a T-statistic of 28.342, and a P-value of 0.000, indicating a highly significant and strong positive relationship. Similarly, EEm directly influences EP with a path coefficient of 0.612 and a T-statistic of 7.047, also statistically significant. The relationship between EE and EP is moderate but significant, with a coefficient of 0.336, a T-statistic of 3.635, and a P-value of 0.000. Importantly, the table also includes the result of the indirect effect of Employee Empowerment on Employee Performance through Employee Engagement, represented as EEm > EE > EP. The path coefficient for this mediation effect is 0.299, with a T-statistic of 3.582 and a P-value of 0.000, indicating that the mediation is statistically significant. This suggests that employee engagement partially mediates the relationship between empowerment and performance. Thus, while empowerment directly enhances performance, it also indirectly boosts performance by increasing employee engagement. These findings emphasize the dual importance

of empowerment in fostering both engagement and improved job outcomes among employees.

The results indicate that the total effect of employee empowerment (EE_m) on employee performance (EP) is 0.910, which includes both direct and indirect influences. The indirect effect, which occurs through the mediating variable employee engagement (EE), is 0.299. This means that part of the influence of empowerment on performance is channeled through engagement. The Variance Accounted For (VAF) value is 32.85%, indicating that employee engagement partially mediates the relationship between empowerment and performance. In other words, approximately one-third of the effect of empowerment on performance is explained through its impact on engagement, while the remaining two-thirds represent a direct effect. This highlights the significant, yet partial, mediating role of employee engagement in enhancing the impact of empowerment on employee performance.

Table 3. Hypothesis Testing Results

Hypothesis	T-statistics	P-values
H1: Employee Empowerment has a positive effect on Employee Performance	7.047	0.000
H2: Employee Empowerment has a positive effect on Employee Engagement	28.342	0.000
H3: Employee Engagement has a positive effect on Employee Performance	3.635	0.000
H4: Employee Engagement positive mediates the indirect effect between Employee Empowerment and Employee Performance	3.582	0.000

The hypothesis testing results presented in the Table 3 demonstrate that all proposed hypotheses are statistically supported. Hypothesis 1 (H1) confirms that employee empowerment has a positive and significant effect on employee performance, with a T-statistic of 7.047 and a p-value of 0.000, indicating strong evidence for acceptance. This implies that when employees are empowered through autonomy and responsibility, their performance improves significantly. Similarly, Hypothesis 2 (H2) reveals that employee empowerment positively influences employee engagement, as indicated by a very high T-statistic of 28.342 and a p-value of 0.000. This suggests that empowerment strategies effectively enhance employees' emotional and psychological connection to their work. Hypothesis 3 (H3) also finds support, showing that employee engagement positively affects employee performance with a T-statistic of 3.635. This finding emphasizes the importance of keeping employees engaged to achieve optimal performance outcomes.

Finally, Hypothesis 4 (H4) confirms that employee engagement serves as a positive and significant mediator in the relationship between empowerment and performance. With a T-statistic of 3.582 and a p-value of 0.000, the results suggest that part of the effect of empowerment on performance occurs indirectly through the enhancement of engagement. This highlights the dual role of empowerment, not only as a direct influence on performance but also as a driver of engagement, which in turn boosts performance outcomes.

5. Discussion

The findings of this study reveal a strong and significant relationship between employee empowerment and employee performance. As shown by the bootstrapping results using SmartPLS, the T-statistic value of 7.047 and a P-value of 0.000 meet the required threshold of $T > 1.96$ and $P < 0.05$. This result affirms that when employees are given authority, autonomy, and trust, they tend to demonstrate better

work outcomes. Empowered employees are more likely to take initiative, feel accountable for their tasks, and actively contribute to innovation and productivity. According to Islam et al. (2022), empowerment fosters intrinsic motivation, enhances job satisfaction, and ultimately improves individual and organizational performance. Supporting this, Al Zeer et al. (2023) and Kara and Çetinel (2023) and Orenuga et al. (2024) found that the provision of autonomy and responsibility directly enhances performance indicators and organizational success. Moreover, employee empowerment significantly increases employee engagement, as evidenced by a T-statistic value of 28.342 and a P-value of 0.000. This strong effect suggests that empowered employees tend to be more emotionally and cognitively invested in their work. When employees are trusted with responsibility and are provided with support and decision-making authority, they feel more connected to their roles and the organization. Nwachukwu et al. (2021) state that empowerment leads to greater enthusiasm, involvement, and alignment with organizational goals. Similarly, Natrajan et al. (2019) highlight that empowerment strategies elevate psychological engagement, reduce stress, and create a work environment that fosters commitment. These factors encourage employees to contribute more fully, demonstrate higher collaboration, and stay motivated to achieve superior performance.

In parallel, employee engagement itself has a significant impact on performance. The T-statistic value of 3.635 and a P-value of 0.000 confirm the robustness of this relationship. Engaged employees exhibit greater enthusiasm, responsibility, and dedication toward their tasks, which in turn improves their work quality and productivity. Masharyono et al. (2023) and Prayogi et al. (2023) emphasize that high levels of engagement are positively correlated with efficiency, lower turnover, and higher job satisfaction. Furthermore, engaged employees are more proactive and solution-oriented, leading to improved team collaboration and organizational outcomes. This is reinforced by Rumman et al. (2020), who argue that employee engagement is crucial to sustaining performance gains over the long term and is a key element of strategic human resource management. Interestingly, the results also indicate that employee engagement positively mediates the relationship between empowerment and performance. The mediation effect is statistically significant, with a T-statistic value of 3.582 and a P-value of 0.000. This finding implies that empowerment alone is not enough to drive optimal performance rather, the engagement fostered by empowerment serves as a channel through which employees apply their motivation and capabilities toward productive behavior. When employees feel empowered, they become more engaged; and through this engagement, their performance improves. Al Zeer et al. (2023) support this perspective by demonstrating that engagement acts as a performance pathway between empowerment and outcome. Likewise, Kara and Çetinel (2023) and Orenuga et al. (2024) provide empirical evidence that engagement reinforces the impact of empowerment on individual and organizational performance.

6. Conclusion

This study reveals that employee empowerment, engagement, and performance are significantly interrelated among Gen Z employees in the formal sector in Semarang. Empowerment positively influences performance, as shown by an Adjusted R-square value of 0.850, while it also significantly enhances engagement (Adjusted R-square = 0.788). Furthermore, employee engagement positively affects performance and serves as a partial mediator between empowerment and performance, with a Variance Accounted For (VAF) value of 32.85%. This highlights that while empowerment directly impacts performance, engagement strengthens and amplifies this relationship. From a practical standpoint, these findings underscore the importance of implementing empowerment strategies such as giving autonomy, responsibility, and support to create a more engaged and high-

performing Gen Z workforce. Organizations should design HR policies that foster a sense of ownership, encourage participation, and support continuous development to enhance both engagement and performance. Engaged employees contribute not only with better productivity but also by reducing turnover and improving organizational resilience.

Theoretically, this research supports and extends the understanding of empowerment theory and engagement-performance linkage in the context of a younger workforce. It confirms that engagement is a key psychological mechanism that translates empowerment into tangible performance outcomes. However, this study is limited by its focus on Gen Z employees in the formal sector in a single city, which may affect generalizability. The use of self-reported, cross-sectional data limits the ability to observe long-term patterns or causal relationships. Only three core variables were explored, excluding other influential factors such as leadership style or organizational culture. Future research should consider expanding the scope to other regions, generations, or sectors, adopting longitudinal or mixed-method approaches, and incorporating additional variables such as work-life balance or cultural dimensions. Comparative studies across generational cohorts may offer deeper insights into varying empowerment needs and engagement behaviors.

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Conflict of Interest Statement

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

Ethical Approval and Originality Statement

Ethical approval was obtained for this study. The manuscript represents original work and has not been previously published, nor is it under consideration by another journal.

Data Disclosure Statement

The data that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.



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